Kin-iro Mosaic Blu-ray Review

Kin-iro Mosaic is the anime adaptation of Yui Hara's slice-of-life comedic manga. It's known as *Kinmoza* or translated as "Golden Mosaic." Apart from the anime, which ran for two seasons, as *Kin-iro Mosaic* and *Hello!! Kin-iro Mosaic,* there was also a 50-minute OVA entitled *Kin-iro Mosaic: Pretty Days* and 82-minute film *Kin-iro Mosaic: Thank You!!*.

This series centers on Shinobu "Shino" Omiya (voiced by Asuka Nishi) who spends time in England during a home stay and becomes friends with a shy blond-haired girl named Alice Cartelet (voiced by Manami Tanaka). Years later, Alice comes back to Japan to stay with Shino and hi-jinks ensue in the process, setting the stage for the entire series.

The friendship of Shino and Alice lives on, even as it faces rough patches caused by the arrival of Alice's friend, Karen Kujo (voiced by Nao Tōyama), and Shino's friends, Aya Komichi (voiced by Risa Taneda) and Yoko Inokuma (voiced by Yumi Uchiyama). There is yuri subtext abound in this series, generally between Alice and Shino or Aya and Yoko. This series has its own charm, but isn't for everyone, as it is very pro-British in a certain way. After all, the first episode is partially set in a quaint English cottage.

This series excels in its nice background art, simple animation (with parts that look like painting), expressive voice acting, and good close-up character shots. Unlike some other anime, where

characters awkwardly speak English, there is an interesting mix of English and Japanese lines. This comes with the idea that Alice and Shino can communicate if they listen to each other's hearts, even if they don't speak the same language. As such, translation and mistranslation are major themes.

Alice and Shino play off each other well, fitting with *Kin-iro Mosaic*'s "feel-good" nature, which doesn't challenge viewers. It's easy to be drawn to the characters, like Aya, who is later nicknamed "Ayaya" by the aforementioned Karen, or the yuri subtext between Aya and Yoko. It *almost* becomes textual, but never reaches that point. Otherwise, Honoka Matsubara (voiced by Ayaka Suwa), who has a fascination with blonde hair like Shino, later develops a big crush on Karen. Often, Aya, as a *tsundere* character, is jealous or annoyed with Yoko, who doesn't understand (or even comprehend) Aya's crush on her. Even so, they remain close friends.

Apart from the animated comic page at the end of each episode, which gives the series character, Alice becomes obsessed with foreign clothing (and items), and each character has their own comedic ticks. Aya's character is smart and competent, but also a klutz, forgetful, and described as "scatterbrained." Alice is sensitive about being short. Other characters are absent-minded and careless, like Shino's older sister Isami Omiya (voiced by Yukari Tamura).

All the characters play off each other nicely. *Kin-iro Mosaic* has spoken English dialogue differing from any other anime I've ever seen. This series has no real stakes, for the most part, which may draw some away from it. Some episodes only consist of character skits strung together! On a

certain level, this series falls into the “cute girls doing cute things” genre, with a focus around a group of friends, some from Japan and others from far-away (England), and their times together. Characters experience embarrassment, jealousy, anger, and annoyance. They show these, and other human emotions, including when they wear certain clothes.

At the same time, the teachers, like the English teacher, Sakura Karasuma (voiced by Satomi Satō), who often wears a tracksuit jersey, and home economics teacher Akari Kuzehashi (voiced by Saori Ōnishi), are an important supporting characters. Sakura tries to resolve friendship disputes between the characters. Akari, who first appears in season 2, tries to figure out *how* to deal with her students. All the while, some characters, like Karen, care little about school, reminding me Eve’s response toward academics at a Japanese golf academy during *Birdie Wing*. Even so, the show’s characters often go to the teachers for help.

There’s one area where *Kin-iro Mosaic* falls down: fatness and weight. In an unnecessary line, in the sixth episode, one character says people shouldn’t eat too much or they will get fat. Alice even convinces Karen to diet. This contrasts with a more positive depiction of fat people in *The Dangers in My Heart*, a manga series adapted into an anime. It features a beautiful girl named Anna Yamada who often snacks in the school library. She *only* reduces her food intake after the boy she likes, Kyotaro Ichikawa, requests it (and she likely resumes her former snack intake later on). The series also features

an overweight supporting character, Chikara Ōta, while another character, Kenta Kanzaki, likes Honoka Hara *because* she is chubby.

Positivity toward fat people is sadly not common in popular culture, including in anime and Western animation, apart from a few examples. In fact, the dub of *Sailor Moon*, available to viewers in Western countries in the 1990s, even altered the plot of one episode so that protagonist Usagi Tsukino would tell her parents that gaining weight wasn't a big deal and to inform viewers about "dangers of crash dieting" while encouraging healthy exercise habits. More broadly, as one site once put it, on a page which is no longer accessible, Asian cultures often significantly emphasize appearance, deeply ingraining the idealization of thinness, with existing culture norms generally associating being slim with "beauty, discipline, and success."

Patricia C. Baxter noted in *Anime Feminist* that fatness is often associated with a clumsy and incompetent anime character who "has an abhorrent and insatiable appetite." This interlocks with the conception that such characters can *only* be respected if they lose some weight. Just consider *Kiss Him, Not Me*, as an example! That isn't the case with this episode of *Kin-iro Mosaic*. They *still* respect Karen after this episode. Even so, gaining weight is depicted as "bad."

Some jokes don't land, like the possibly anti-Indigenous one in the eighth episode about a totem pole. Even so, this series shines when it comes to character interactions, like playful teasing, as they learn more about one another, even through imaginary stories. This happens at sleepovers, flower-planting, tea parties, and lunchtime (during school hours). At times, there are friendship strains between characters, often caused by terrible misunderstandings, like Alice's reported homesickness (she missed her dog), or Yoko damaging something Aya gave her. They are quickly resolved.

Kin-iro Mosaic has further positives. For instance, different characters introduce each episode in the opening sequence, something I didn't notice until I was more than half-way through the second season! Unlike other series, families of the protagonists are supportive, despite occasional tension, with issues easily solved. Flashbacks effectively convey information. Usually the comedy is well-timed. This fits with general yuri subtext and cute moments between the characters, including a beach episode.

In the penultimate episode, Alice and Karen return to England briefly, making Honoka and Shino lonely for those they like. In the series finale, they all come back together, and everything ends on a good note. One yuri reviewer made a good point about this series: it's about cute girls doing cute things, but also tells the story of certain young girls "harboring deep, unrivaled romantic affections for other girls." It intends on helping people relax, is not flashy, has no action sequences, and is down to earth. *Kin-iro Mosaic* is "yurirific" in more ways than one, which even excited long-time yuri reviewers!

I will remember characters like Koto Inokuma (voiced by Megumi Han) and Mitsumi Inokuma (voiced by Rie Murakawa), Yoko's younger brother and sister. They often lie and make up weird tales, and help Aya *hopefully* confess to Yoko. Surely there are other characters which are wingpeople (?) for women who have crushes on other women, but this is a key part of this series. Similarly, about characters like Kuzehashi, will stick with me. She becomes good friends with Karen, has trouble

connecting with the students, and even sees another teachers (who she attended school with years before) as a role-model and her senpai-of-sorts.

The voice actors for *Kin-iro Mosaic* are incredibly talented. In fact, Alice's voice actress, Manami Tanaka has a noted ability to speak in English. This series voice actresses used their voices to bring characters to life in *The Devil Is a Part-Timer!*, *Komi Can't Communicate, Your Lie in April,* and *Tari Tari*, but also in series with direct, or indirect, yuri themes. This includes series which aired this year, such as *Jellyfish Can't Swim in the Night*, *The Many Sides of Voice Actor Radio*, *Train to the End of the World*, and *Laid-Back Camp*. Those from previous years include *Healer Girl*, *Ippon Again!*, *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl*, *Yuri Is My Job!*, *K-On!*, *Management of a Novice Alchemist*, and *Little Witch Academia.*

I will surely remember the voice actors, since they voiced characters in some of my favorite series, like *Bodacious Space Pirates*, *D4DJ First Mix*, *BanG Dream! It's My Go!!!!!*, *Love Live! School Idol Project*, *The Aquatope on White Sand*, *The Demon Girl Next Door*, *R.O.D. the TV*, *RWBY: Ice Queendom*, *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure*, *Flip Flappers*, and *The Dangers in My Heart.*

They also voiced characters in *Non Non Biyori*, *Gargantia on the Verdurous Planet*, *Shikimori's Not Just a Cutie*, *Skip and Loafer*, *and The Apothecary Diaries*. In addition, characters in *Girl Friend Beta*, *Encouragement of Climb*, *Girl in Twilight*, *Sound! Euphonium*, *Asteroid in Love*, *Let's Make a*

Mug Too, *Oshi no Ko*, and *Land of the Lustrous*, and *B Gata H Kei* were voiced by these same individuals too. Undoubtedly, their voices live on far beyond this series.

Studio Gokumi, which produced this series, came into existence fourteen years ago. Its most recent series to-date is *Stardust Telepath*, yuri sci-fi series which could have been more direct with the romantic feelings between the protagonists. It also produced *Ms. Vampire Who Lives in My Neighborhood*, a comedy anime filled with yuri subtext.

Tensho, who directed *Kinmoza*'s first and second seasons, stylized as *Kin-iro Mosaic* and *Hello!! Kin-iro Mosaic*, also did key animation on *R.O.D. the TV, Destiny of the Shrine Maiden*, and *Kokoro Library.* Yunika Ayano, writing composer for this series, also composed stories throughout the BanG Dream! franchise. In addition, she wrote episode scripts for *D4DJ First Mix, Flip Flappers, Given,* and *Sweet Blue Flowers.* As I noted in January of this year, some described her as a go-to person "for yuri content."

The special features are, unfortunately, limited. There is no commentary and only subtitled Japanese original voices. No one ever dubbed *Kin-iro Mosaic*. All 24 episodes are on four discs, totaling about 600 minutes long. The second disc has special features consisting of clean closing and opening animations. Similar features are on fourth disc. However, each disc menu is colorful, drawing in the viewer, as shown in the above composite of opening screens for all four menus.

I wish that someday there would be a special, limited edition of this series released, rather than buying the sadly limited Blu-ray on Sentai Filmworks (as I did since it is streaming on HIDIVE), Robert's Anime Corner Store, Amazon, or elsewhere. In any case, I will fondly remember this series, for its voice acting, its yurish themes, overall nature, and comedy. The latter includes episodes like the third episode of the second season, when some of the characters (like Karen) begin playing April Fools Day (including the absurd claim she is 100% Japanese even though she was born in England) to mess with Alice and others.

Although this series is not a fantasy comedy with yuri subtext like *Delicious in Dungeon* or *'Tis Time for "Torture," Princess*, a series centered on cute girls placing mahjong (*Pon no Michi*), a cyberpunk mecha (*Metallic Rouge*) or centered on magical girls (*Wonderful Pretty Cure!*), it still has its own value. Surely, it depicts British-ness more positively than *R.O.D. the TV* which depicts the British Library as the series antagonists as they try to seize all the world's knowledge for themselves. But, that's okay.

I will remember watching *Kin-iro Mosaic* day after day sitting at my Blu-ray player, going through each episode, and writing this review, which I began compiling in late April of this year. Even though this series doesn't focus on trauma, (romantic) angst, discrimination, gender transition, and murder, like some other series this year, it sticks with you. I'm glad I watched this series. For years ahead, the Blu-ray collection will remain on my shelf, ready for when I want to experience the series with fresh-eyes once again.

Animation	★★★☆☆
Voice Acting	★★★★☆
Slice-of-Life Comedy	★★★★☆
Special Features	★★☆☆☆
Writing	★★★☆☆
Yuri-ness	★★★★☆

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★★★☆☆

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